



CULTURAL TOURS



DISTANCE BETWEEN SOFIA AND MAIN EUROPEAN CITIES

Amsterdam	2164	Lisbon	3535
Athens	784	London	2249
Belgrade	385	Madrid	2934
Berlin	1620	Milan	1417
Bratislava	970	Moscow	2163
Brussels	2122	Oslo	2451
Budapest	775	Paris	2265
Bucharest	394	Prague	1291
Warsaw	1457	Rome	1662
Vienna	1020	Skopje	221
Geneva	1724	Stockholm	1812
Zagreb	765	Helsinki	2461
Copenhagen	2001	Zurich	1760



Winery



Monastery

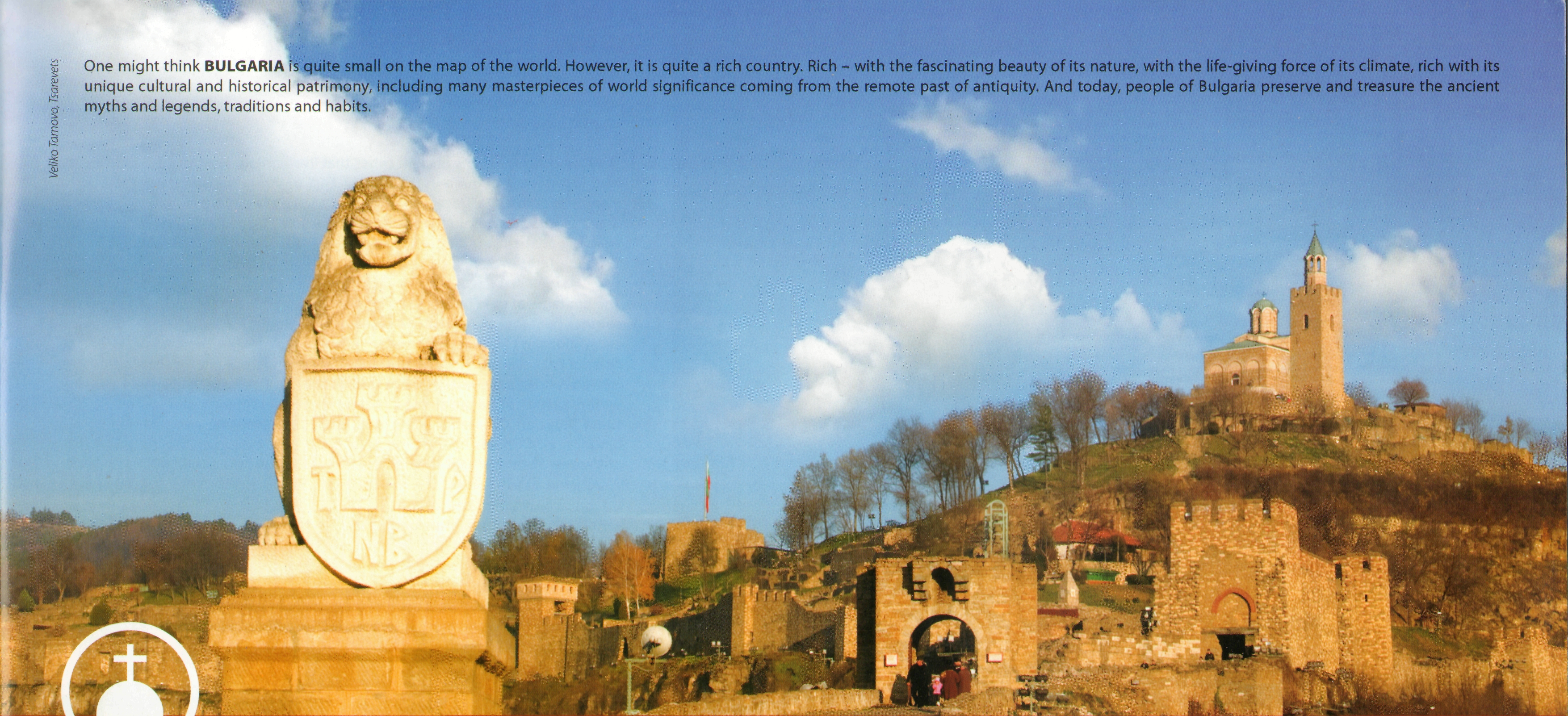


Ethnographic Complex



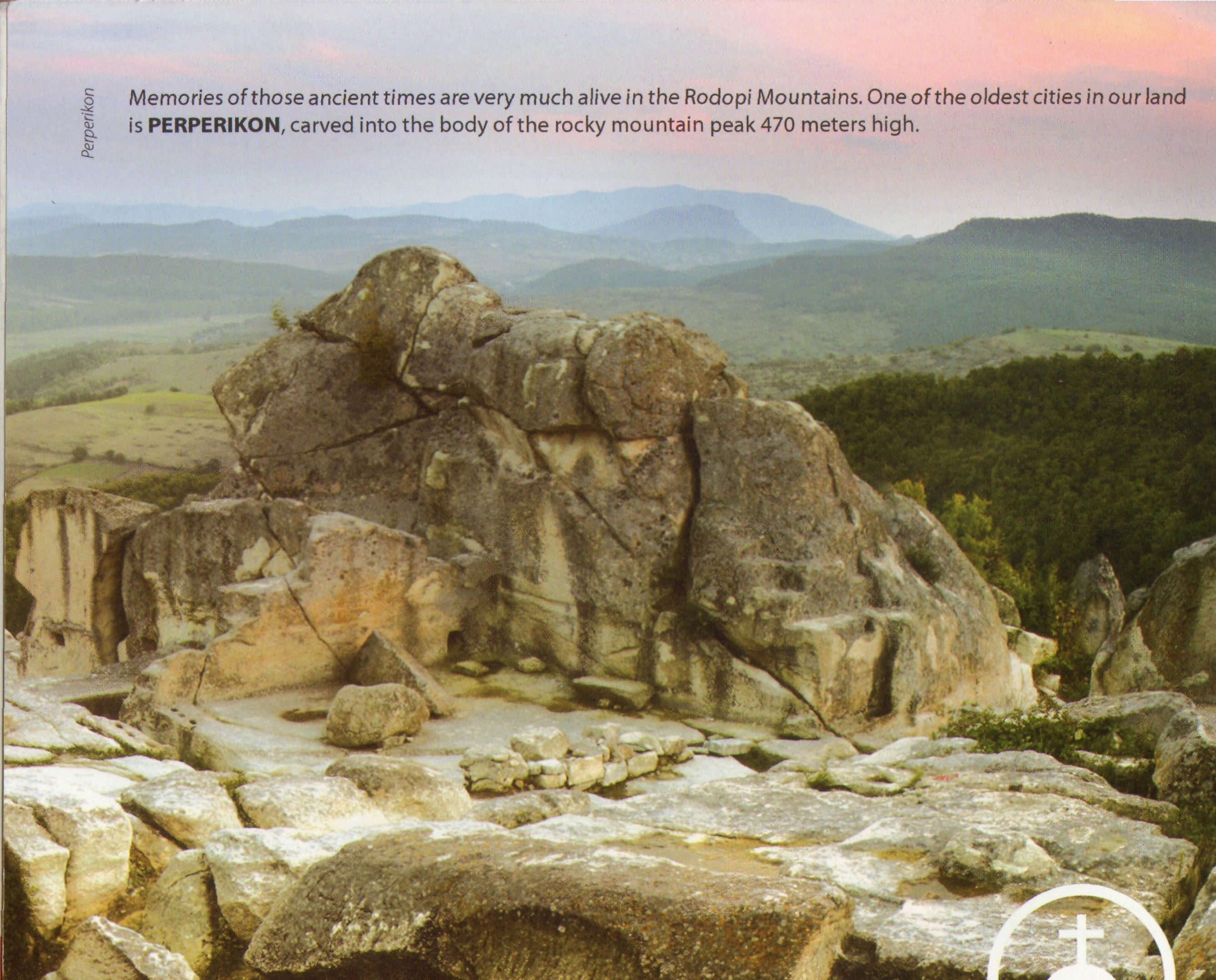
Historical Site

One might think **BULGARIA** is quite small on the map of the world. However, it is quite a rich country. Rich – with the fascinating beauty of its nature, with the life-giving force of its climate, rich with its unique cultural and historical patrimony, including many masterpieces of world significance coming from the remote past of antiquity. And today, people of Bulgaria preserve and treasure the ancient myths and legends, traditions and habits.



For nearly seven millennia all known great civilizations of the ancient world have had their historical moment of presence and inhabitancy on what is contemporary **BULGARIA'S** land, their cultures and systems of values forming the foundations of what is Europe today. These are the civilizations of the first ever known pre-historic communities, of the Thracians, the Greeks of Ancient Hellas, of Rome and Byzantium, of the Bulgarians, and even of Islam. Several monuments and archaeological finds bear the traces and the memories of the historic past. Ancient cities, tombs and sanctuaries have the typical characteristics of the Thracian, Greek or Roman civilizations. Medieval fortresses, necropolis, monastery complexes are the evidence and proof of the might of both the First and the Second Bulgarian kingdoms. Many villages hidden in the mountains, pretty and colourful, keep alive the spirit and the culture of Bulgarian Revival. Numerous as well are the monuments and records of the lives and activities of Cyril and Methodius, the Holly Brothers, who bestowed the world with the Slavic alphabet. The following pages are dedicated to the richest heritage that the seven great civilizations bequeathed to Bulgaria of today, both real and mystical.

Memories of those ancient times are very much alive in the Rodopi Mountains. One of the oldest cities in our land is **PERPERIKON**, carved into the body of the rocky mountain peak 470 meters high.



THRACIAN CULTURE

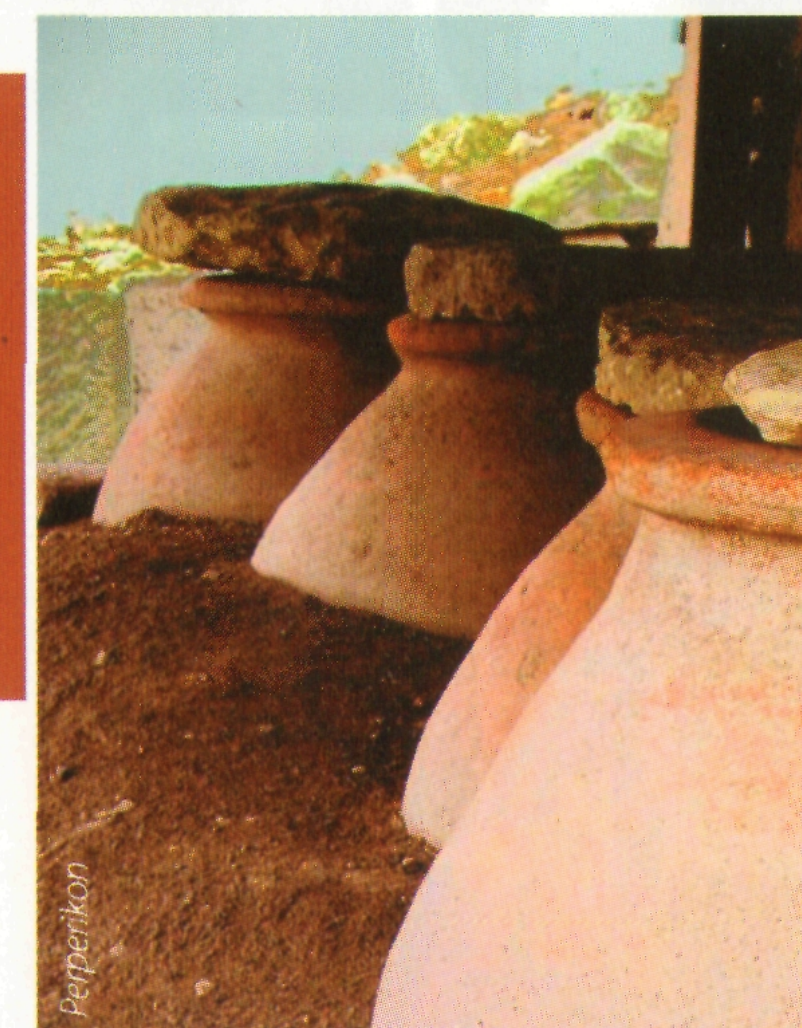


They are countless – the ancient tribes that lived on our land, or the horse-riders, who just passed through in their way – East or West. But one thing is certain – memories or material traces remain long after they're gone. It is strongly believed, that the Thracians left behind fabulous treasures, hurriedly burrowed in the soil, which kept them for centuries, to preserve the memories of the times, when Orpheus, Teres or Sevt lived here, and Dionysius was God.

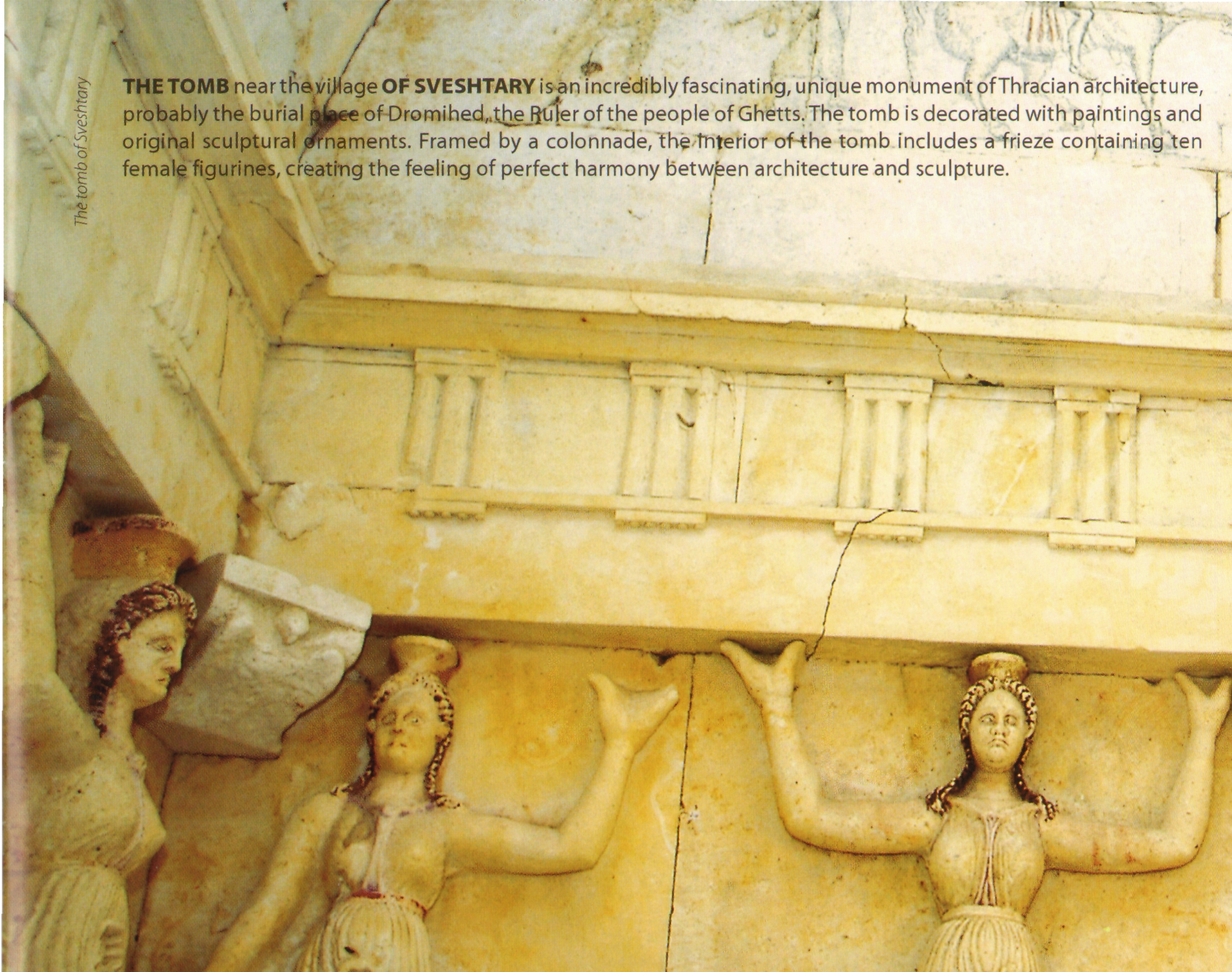
The heritage of the Thracians, the earliest inhabitants of our land, could rival the cultural heritage of Ancient Hellas, of Egypt, Rome, Persia. The archaeological excavations in the Valley of Thracian Kings, discovered in the area between the cities of Kazanlak and Karlovo, present a very strong evidence for that contention. Nowadays this area, known more traditionally as The Rose Valley, is densely set with remnants of pagan shrines, mound-tombs and many other symbols of the Great Thracian Civilization. **THE ANCIENT SEVTOPOLIS** – the capital of the Kingdom of Odrisses by the time of Sevt the 3-rd, is hidden deep in the waters of Barrage Koprinka near Kazanlak, while the Sepulchre of the King himself was discovered in excavating the **MOUND GOLYAMA KOSMATKA**, together with a fabulous treasure, containing the golden wreath, the golden mask, and an exquisitely elegant sculpture of the King, Sevt the 3-rd.

Among the monuments of Thracian art the **SEPULCHRE OF KAZANLAK** is the one that is preserved best, one of the few, containing original paintings – masterpieces from antiquity.

The Sepulchre of Kazanlak is the first monument in Bulgaria, included in the most prestigious list of world monuments under the aegis of UNESCO.



THE TOMB near the village **OF SVESHTARY** is an incredibly fascinating, unique monument of Thracian architecture, probably the burial place of Dromihed, the Ruler of the people of Ghetts. The tomb is decorated with paintings and original sculptural ornaments. Framed by a colonnade, the interior of the tomb includes a frieze containing ten female figurines, creating the feeling of perfect harmony between architecture and sculpture.

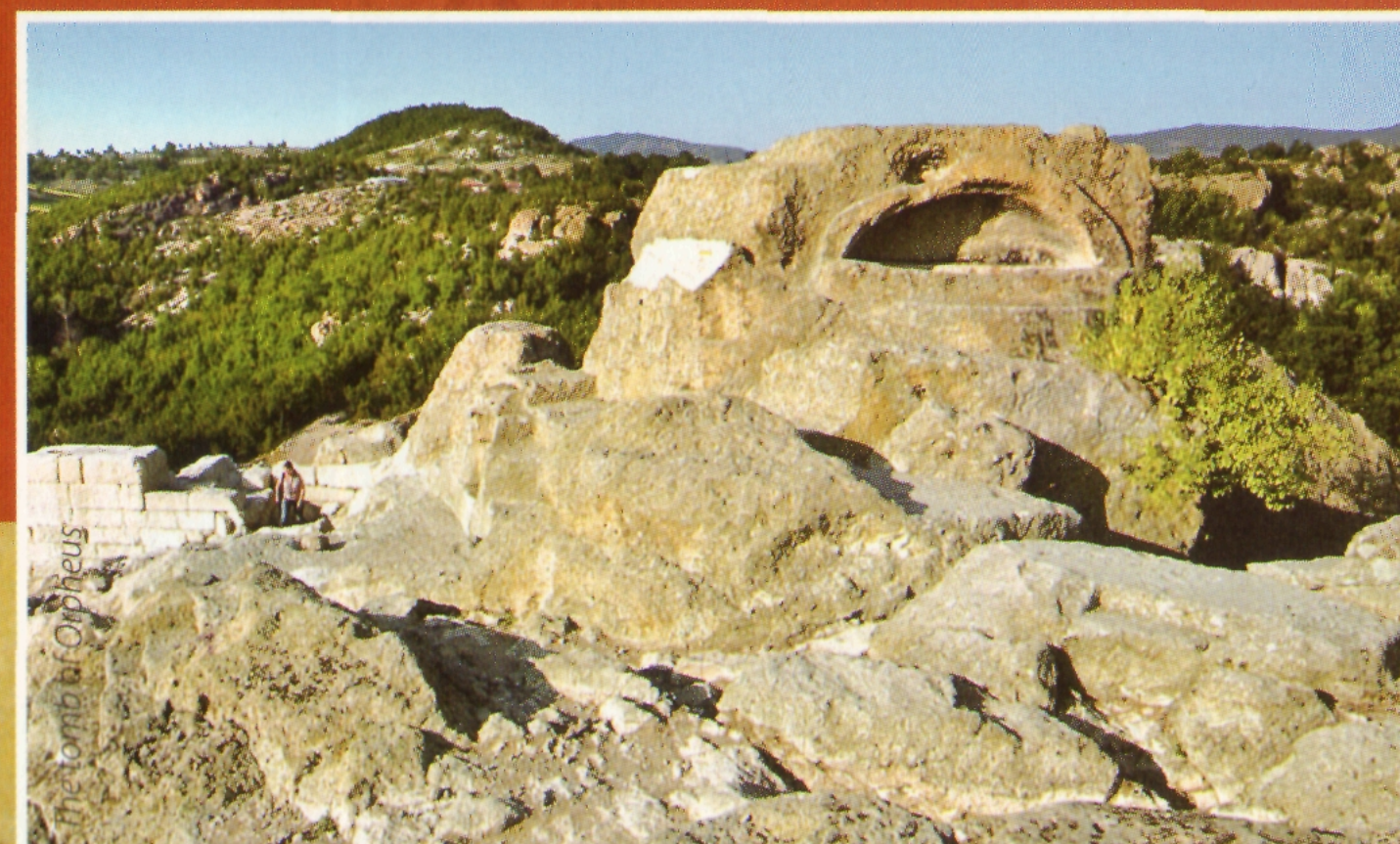


Officially, the name of the mountain massif is the Rodopi Mountains, but for many these are the Mountains of Orpheus, where the famous Thracian musician lived and sang. Homer, the poet of Ancient Greece, called the Rodopi Mountains – the snowy mountains of the Thracians. Ovidius wrote about a proud Thracian king and his beautiful wife. Their love was so strong, their power so almighty, that at one moment they dared to call each other Zeus and Hera. When the real God – Zeus the Thunderer, learned about that, he burst out in anger and didn't hesitate to turn them into two mountains – Hemus and Rodopi – close enough to see, but unable to touch each other.

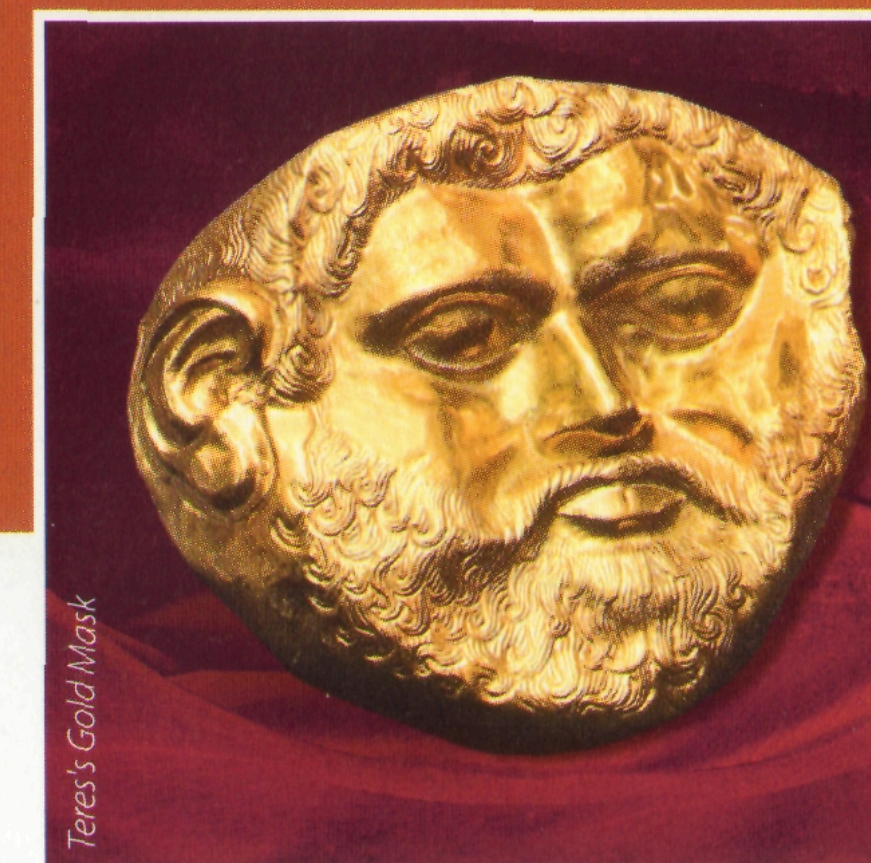
In the North-Eastern part of Bulgaria, in the geographical region of Ludogorie, you'll find the History-Archaeology Reserve Sboryanovo, unique with its ancient monuments – settlements, sanctuaries, necropolis, built and being in use from antiquity to present days. The pearl of the Complex is the Sepulchre of Sveshtary. It is included in the World Patrimony – the famous list of UNESCO. The Sepulchre was subjected to a careful conservation and restoration, with a special roof built to ensure its protection.

In addition to its unique ancient monuments and living traditions, the Reserve "Sboryanovo" is rich with its natural beauty, with its wonderful scenery. The visitors, who love History, shouldn't miss the chance to visit **THE TOMB OF** the famous **SITALK** in the village of Starosel, where ancient rituals were observed, supposedly by Orphists – followers of the legendary singer.

THE TATUL COMPLEX includes in its territory an ancient pagan sanctuary and a medieval fortress. **THE TOMB OF ORPHEUS** was also discovered in Tatul.



The tomb of Orpheus



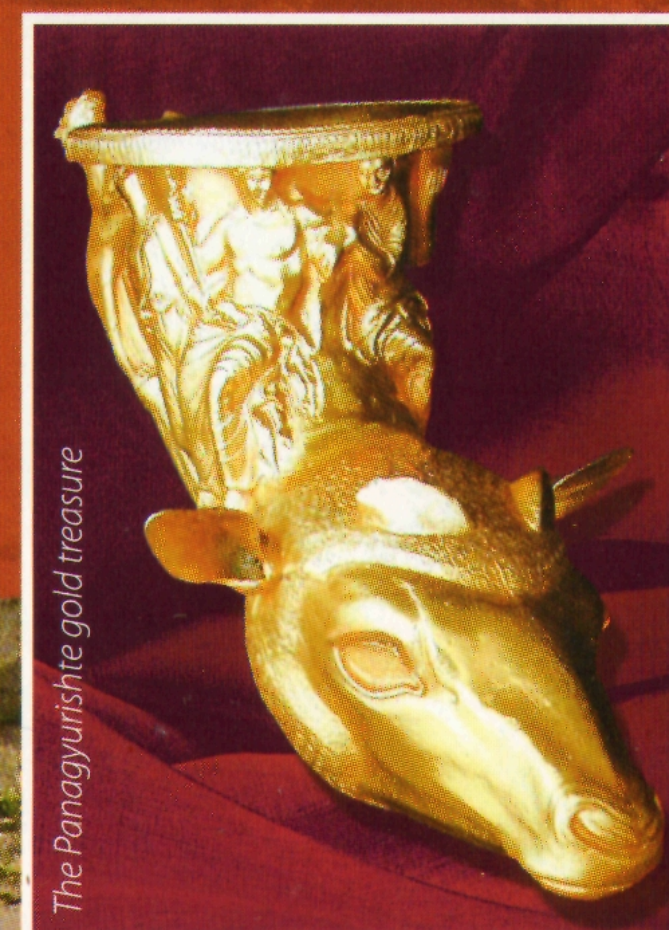
Teres's Gold Mask



There is room for some mysticism in the journey you can easily undertake – starting in Thracian times, through the Middle Ages, up to the early years of the 19-th century. You just need to visit the **FORTRESS OF KING ASSEN** /or Assenova krepost/ near the city of Assenovgrad, **THE FORTRESS OF BABA VIDA** in the town of Vidin, **THE FORTRESS NEAR BELOGRADCHIK** with the world-famous rocks, **THE SERDIKA FORTRESS** in Sofia, **THE HISSAR FORTRESS** in Lovech, **THE FORTRESSES OF KRICHIM** and **MEZEK**. The rest you'll be told by your local hosts, always kind and attentive. Various finds from far-off glorious times are the material evidence for the richness of the life and culture of the Bulgarian people. The most important golden treasures in the museums of contemporary Bulgaria come from the Thracians – the Golden Treasure found in the Necropolis of Varna, the golden treasure found near the village of Valchitran (now in the National Archaeological Museum), the treasure found near Panagyurishte (now on display in the National History Museum), the treasure found near Rogozen (on display in the National History Museum), the treasure found recently in the excavations of the Kosmatka Mould (National Archaeological Museum).

FORTRESSES

They are numerous – the remains of fortresses, rock-hewn churches and monasteries, silent witnesses of millennia of history, telling the stories of the glorious warriors, who lived here and defended Bulgaria, but – in the same time – demonstrating the strength of their faith and the height of their culture. Every single stone here is telling part of the heroic history of the Bulgarian people during long centuries, every single fragment of the ruins of an ancient fortress has its part of the legend to tell.



The Panagyurishte gold treasure



Preslav treasure



The rock-hewn churches and monasteries form a specific group of Christian temples, spread out mainly in the Balkans and the Middle East.

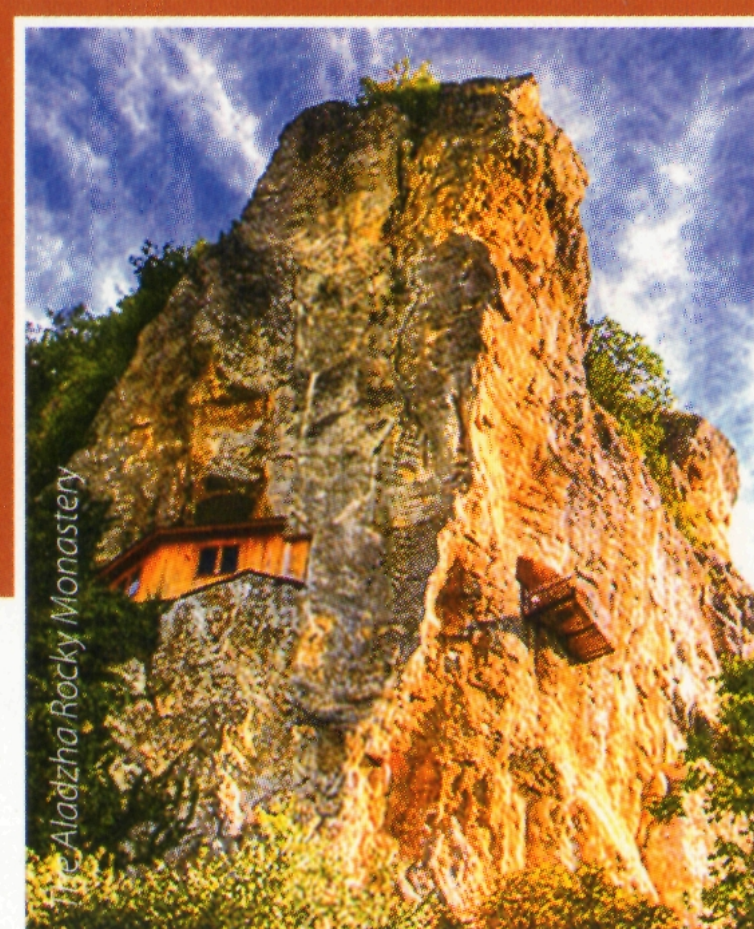
THE BESSARBOVSKY MONASTERY is the only functioning male rock-hewn monastery. According to the legend, there St Dimitri Bessarbovski spent a lifetime. You can visit the Rock Church and part of the Monastery, including the cave where is the niche of the saint. At the foot of the rock, in the garden, you'll have a chance to taste the healing water of the well, dug-out by Saint Dimitri himself.

Another big complex of churches, chapels and monasteries was delved deep into the rocks for centuries by generations of monks, in the valley of the river Rusenski Lom (in the North-East of Bulgaria), near the village of Ivanovo. **THE COMPLEX OF IVANOVO ROCK-HEWN CHURCHES** is also included in the cultural heritage of *UNESCO*. The earliest hermit monks delved their cellars in the 12-th century. The mural paintings there, dated from the 14-th century, prove the high level of artistic skill, typical for the painting-art school of the ancient Bulgarian capital Tarnovo.

THE ALADZHA ROCK MONASTERY is the most important of its kind in the Black Sea Coastal Region. Its location is near the Golden Sands Resort Complex. Those who love exploring the secrets of the unknown shouldn't miss this marvellous rock complex, whose digging started as far as the 12-th century, carefully preserved till present time.



ROCK-HEWN CHURCHES AND MONASTERIES



Led by their faith in God, the peoples, living in Bulgarian lands, built many churches, many monasteries. In present times, these temples, built in different periods of time, lend their authentic charm to the country as a whole, and quite naturally, are considered to be part of the most remarkable places to visit.

THE MONASTERY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE HOLY MOTHER is known also as the **TROYAN MONASTERY** (near the city of Troyan). Located in the foot of the mountain range of Stara Planina, this monastery is the third largest in the country. The frescoes in the church and in the Monastery are painted by the hand of one of the most renowned Bulgarian artists Zahary Zograf, who made his studies in the Samokov School of Arts and Iconography. In the central church of the Monastery the visitor would take inspiration from the oldest and most venerated icon – Miraculous Three-Handed Mother of God.

THE ROZHEN MONASTERY is one of the most interesting, most important religious and cultural centres on Bulgarian territory. It is located near the city of Melnik. The frescoes, decorating the narthex of the main church, are among the earliest, probably from the 16-th century. They concentrate mainly on depicting scenes of Christ after the Resurrection.

THE PREOBRAZHENSKI MONASTERY is located in an area some 10 km from the Fortress of Tsarevets near Veliko Tarnovo. The scenery around it is of exceptional beauty. It was founded in the 14-th century, still functioning, famous also with the vivid colours of its outer walls.

We have tried with this brochure to make a shortest possible presentation of only a small part of Bulgaria's monasteries. Whatever region you visit in Bulgaria, you will inevitably find many such temples of our faith and in addition the local people will tell you the local sagas and legends about the healing powers of Nature in their place.



The Rila Monastery



Troyan Monastery



MONASTERIES AND ICONS





THE RILA MONASTERY is undoubtedly the largest in Bulgaria, a place for massive pilgrimage by people, coming from all over the world. It was founded in the 10-th century, and, after a time, it gradually turned out to become a place of great activity, an outstanding and vivid spiritual, cultural, and religious centre. The Monastery of course makes part of the UNESCO book of world heritage, due to the enormity of its cultural, historic, architectural or artistic values of world significance. One of the most interesting items in the Monastery is the Icon of the Holy Mother of Odyghitria, wonder-working, divided into 32 sections in the form of a quadrangle, every one containing the relics of some Saint. According to the beliefs of local population, the icon is very helpful to people gravely ill. Another treasure of major importance is the Monastery's library.

Near the village of Bachkovo (next to Assenovgrad) is the place of one of the oldest monasteries on the Balkan Peninsula, where inter-action of three cultures was put into practice – the cultures of Byzantium, of Antic Georgia and Bulgaria. **THE MONASTERY OF BACHKOVO** possesses and keeps some priceless monuments of architecture and of art, considered to be of major importance for the culture of Orthodox Christianity as a whole. The holiest thing in the Monastery of Bachkovo is the icon of the Holy Mother. Thousands of believers come to the Monastery to avow their grievances and sufferings in front of the wonder-working icon of the Holy Mother of Bachkovo, and, filled with spiritual elation, go back to their homes.





The Memorial Temple of the Nativity

CHURCHES



St George's Rotunda

Bulgaria is rich in number of temples, unique in their authenticity, scattered over the territory of the whole country.

THE BOYANA CHURCH is in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The frescoes, painted in 1259 are of highest artistic, historic and documental value. The Church is part – a branch – of the National History Museum. In that Museum you would be able to get acquainted with the history of the different cultures, created by the peoples inhabiting our lands.

All the people in the world cherish the memory of the items, places or persons it considers as sacred, as holy relics. This veneration is often expressed by erecting real temples, where people gather to render homage to the heroism of their ancestors. In the village of Batak the main fortress of our faith, the sacrosanct temple for all Bulgarians, is **THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SUNDAY OF BATAK**. While inside the Church, the visitor's feet are touching the soil, consecrated with the blood and bones of thousands of Bulgarians, massacred in just one day in 1876 by the Ottoman tyrants. Now, in the beginning of the 21-st century, this monument is respected by both the Christian and Muslim population as a moral lesson, monitoring the most important thing – that hatred is not the key to the prosperous future, but – also – that history should be remembered, too.

Another holy place from the same period is **THE MEMORIAL TEMPLE OF THE NATIVITY** - majestic, imposing, built on the southern foot of the Balkan – it is one of the monuments of special admiration for the people of Bulgaria, a pantheon giving the status of immortality to the sacrifice of the Russian soldiers and Bulgarian volunteers, fallen in the Russia-Turkey war for the liberation of Bulgaria (1877-1878). Every people is paying due respect to its best sons. For sure every Bulgarian puts in this category the Holy Brothers Cyril and Methodius, the originators of the Slavic alphabet, our script, undoubtedly one of the highest achievements of the Slavic peoples during the Middle Ages.

ST GEORGE'S ROTUNDA is located in the centre of the capital-city Sofia. It is part of a big complex of edifices, built in the beginning of the 4-th century - the Palace of Emperor Constantine the Great, in later times palace of Sebastocrator Kaloyan. During its thousand years of existence it has been used as a public building, as a shrine, and even as a representative residential house. Now the Church is a museum.



THE ALEXANDER NEVSKI CATHEDRAL is the site of Bulgaria's Patriarch, it is also the the most beautiful and majestic symbol of the Capital. Believers visiting Sofia, as well as the citizens themselves don't miss also calling on the Temple of St Nikolay the Thaumaturge (also known as The Russian Church), to bow to the tomb of Archbishop Seraphim, and leave a message of prayer, hoping that he will help them in their recovery.





THE SACRED PLACES

Let us continue with our journey in the world of the mystic. The Sacred Places in Bulgaria are visited by thousands of people every year. Every weekend religious communities undertake organized pilgrimage trips. From the oldest of ages people were aware of the existence of energy centres, having built there special sacrificial altars, implementing their pagan rituals. Nowadays these locations of high concentration of positive energy are ground for monasteries and churches.

THE RODOPI MOUNTAINS

Many people believe that a piece of Christ's crucifix is buried into the soil of Krastova Gora (The Forest of the Cross), an area in the heart of the Rodopi, the Mountain of Orpheus. Thousands of pilgrims come here every year on the eve of the 14-th of September, the Holy Day of the Elevation of the Cross, to spend the night there in prayer for health. Everyone hoping to find some piece of stone with a mark of a cross, which, it is believed, helps curing pain and illness. The Rodopi Mountains are famous and glorified for being a powerful energy source. Another mystic place in the mountain is the rock phenomenon Belintash, or The Stone of Knowledge halfway on the road connecting Assenovgrad and Kardzhali – a tribal sanctuary of the Besses, dedicated to Sabasy, the ancient Thracian Deity. According to a local legend, the waters of The Deluge reached as high as Belintash, and its loops were used to bind Noah's Arc. Many people tried to climb Belintash, but only a few were successful, most often something unexpected happened to them on their way up through the rocks. Those who were lucky to get there, tell that many strange and inexplicable things happened to them. Scientists, exploring the cavities of the rocks, found traces of a grandiose ancient astronomic observatory, while those who were having a compass, saw its needle getting mad. When you come to the Rodopi Mountains, once you start feeling yourself dominated by the magic power of the mountain, or by the sound of the bagpipe, don't forget visiting the fortresses of Ustra and Mezek, the grottos Yagodinska and the Devil's Gorge, the Wondrous Bridges and then the Devil's Bridge. There, once more, you will have the feeling of being in the world of the legends.

"Our mountains and lakes are sacrosanct, just like those in India. A day will come, when people from all over the world will be coming here to draw energy. The lakes in the mountain of Rila, all seven of them, are a recess from Paradise, they are our connection with the Space. This is the explanation why Danov visited these places so often". These were words, said by Vanga, the Bulgarian woman, famous with her prophecies.

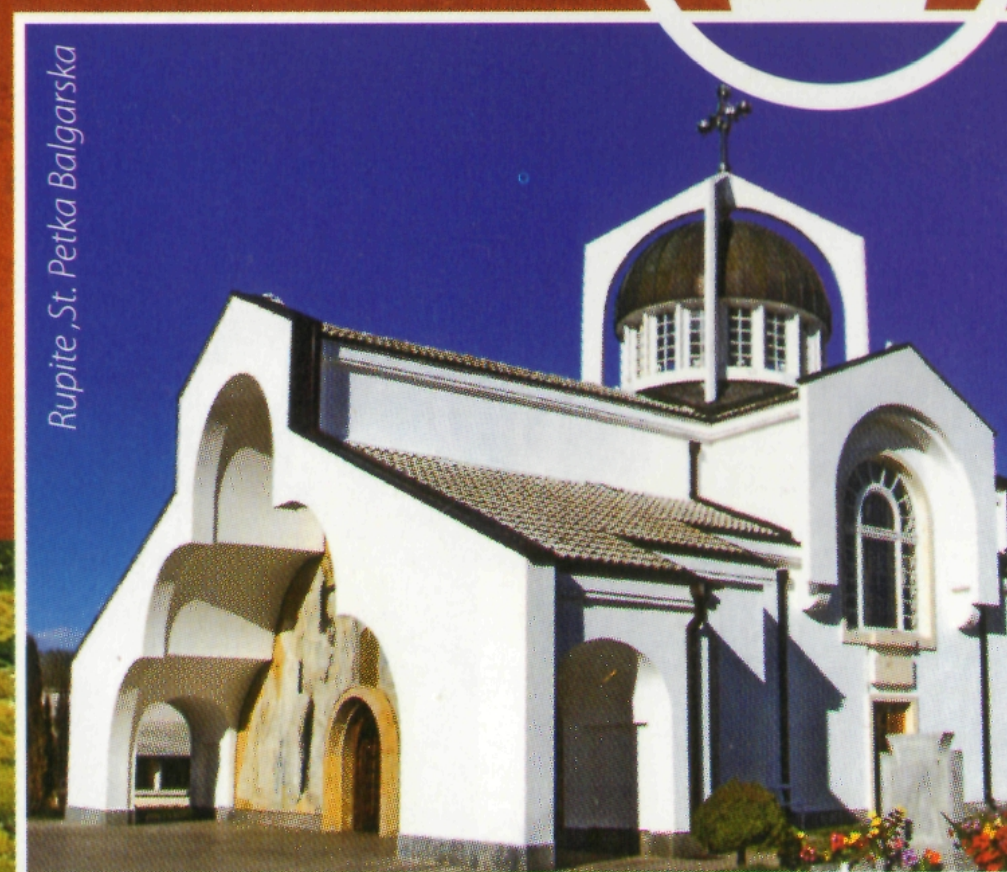


RILA

Rila is a mountain, carefully hiding its mystical secrets for many centuries up to the present days. Its seven lakes are an attractive destination for pilgrims from all over the world. Between March and October adherents of the so-called The White Brotherhood founded by The Teacher – Petar Danov - frequent the region to perform their ritual dances – the PanEuRythmia, materializing the positive connection of Beauty with Natural Phenomena. Only a few kilometres from the Rila Monastery is the tomb of St. Ivan Rilski, within the cave, in which the earliest Bulgarian hermit lived and prayed. The legend says that sinners cannot pass through the cave. Nearby is the stone-built fountain tap, where the pilgrims observe the centuries-long tradition to leave a notice to the Saint asking for his help in the accomplishment of their wishes. People believe that whatever wish you put in your notice, it will come true. You only need to believe.

**RUPITE**

The vicinity of Rupite near the town of Petrich is known for years as the place, where the famous and most popular woman-prophet Vanga was regaining her strength and energy, where people from all over the country were coming for her assessment and advice. The local church, named St. Petka Bulgarska, built by the Prophetess, has become the focal point for the pilgrimage of thousands of people, ill or suffering, still believing in miracles.



Rupite, St. Petka Bulgarska



St. Ivan Rilski

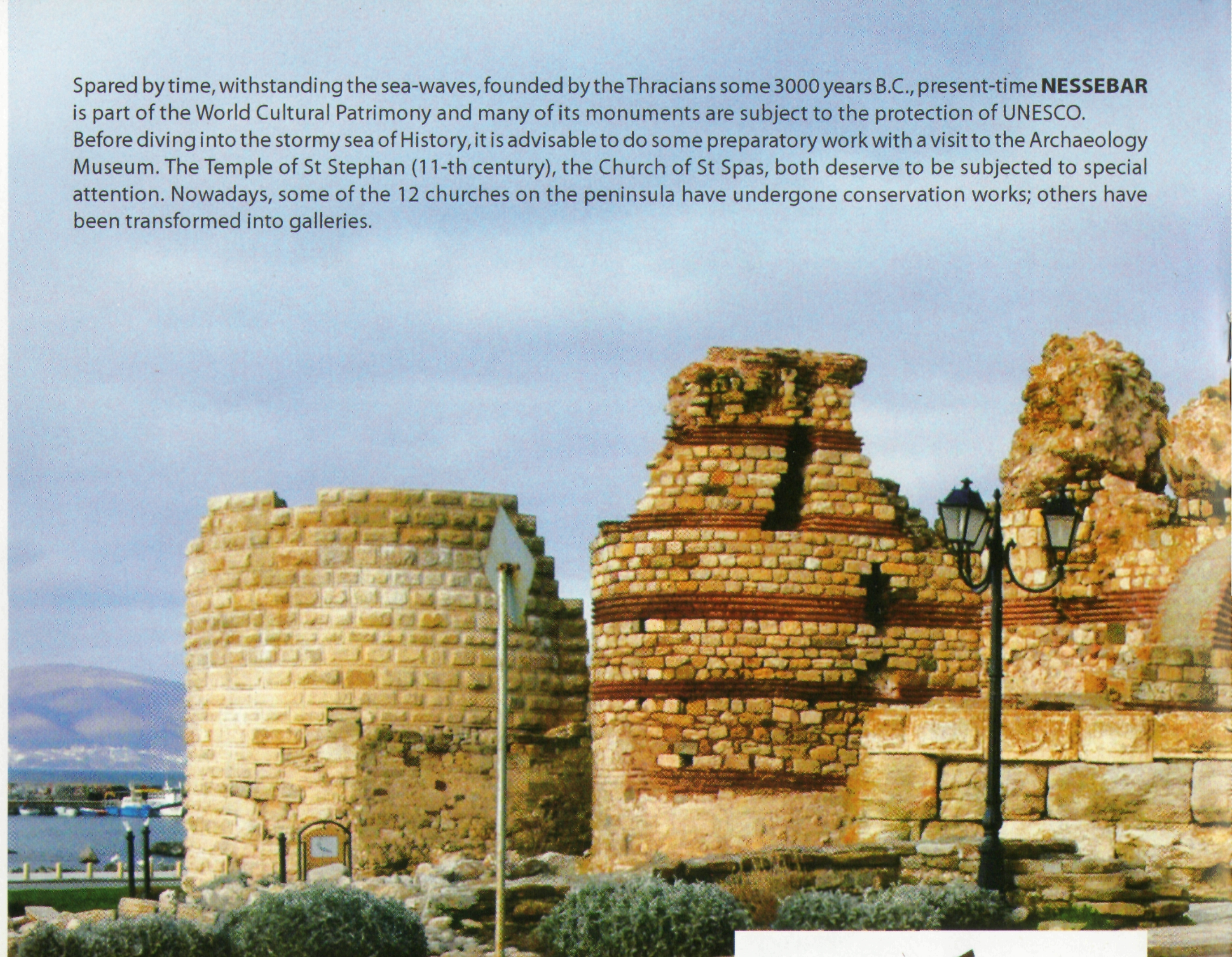
THE BLACK SEA has always been, starting with Antiquity, an attractive place for the different civilizations. The large numbers of remains from these glorious periods of time are still attracting thousands of visitors. Varna's Acropolis was the place, where the world's oldest cultivated gold was found. Also there are the old Roman Thermes.

SOZOPOL gives out a sweet perfume of romantics, sea-waves and oil-paint. 2600 years ago, Greek expatriates from Asia Minor, having seen the Peninsula, and the islands surrounding it, decided to settle there. They honoured the town with a godly name – Apolonia, after Apolo, the Protector of Art. With its well preserved churches, and a number of houses, made of lumber and stone, Sozopol has an architectural style of its own. The Annual Artistic Festivities are by themselves a genuine review of Bulgaria's contemporary art of all kinds.

Not far from Nessebar you'll find **POMORIE** - a settlement founded by the Greeks, named Anhialo, by the end the 5-th century BC. In Pomorie, don't miss visiting the Thracian Cupola Tomb, the churches, named after Jesus-Christ and Holy Mother, as well as the Monastery of St George and the Architectural Reserve The Old Houses of Pomorie.

BALCHIK is one of the oldest cities on the Black Sea Coast, with temples emanating dignity, with old fountains and old cobblestone streets. The outlines of the houses, the colours of its gardens put together the exotics and the romanticism of the Balkans, drawing-in visitors from all over the world. In the town's Museum of History you may observe some finds from the Temple of Kibela, the ancient Goddess from Asia Minor, discovered recently in Balchik, as well as many other objects, evidence of the richness of the cultural life on these lands.

Spared by time, withstanding the sea-waves, founded by the Thracians some 3000 years B.C., present-time **NESSEBAR** is part of the World Cultural Patrimony and many of its monuments are subject to the protection of UNESCO. Before diving into the stormy sea of History, it is advisable to do some preparatory work with a visit to the Archaeology Museum. The Temple of St Stephan (11-th century), the Church of St Spas, both deserve to be subjected to special attention. Nowadays, some of the 12 churches on the peninsula have undergone conservation works; others have been transformed into galleries.

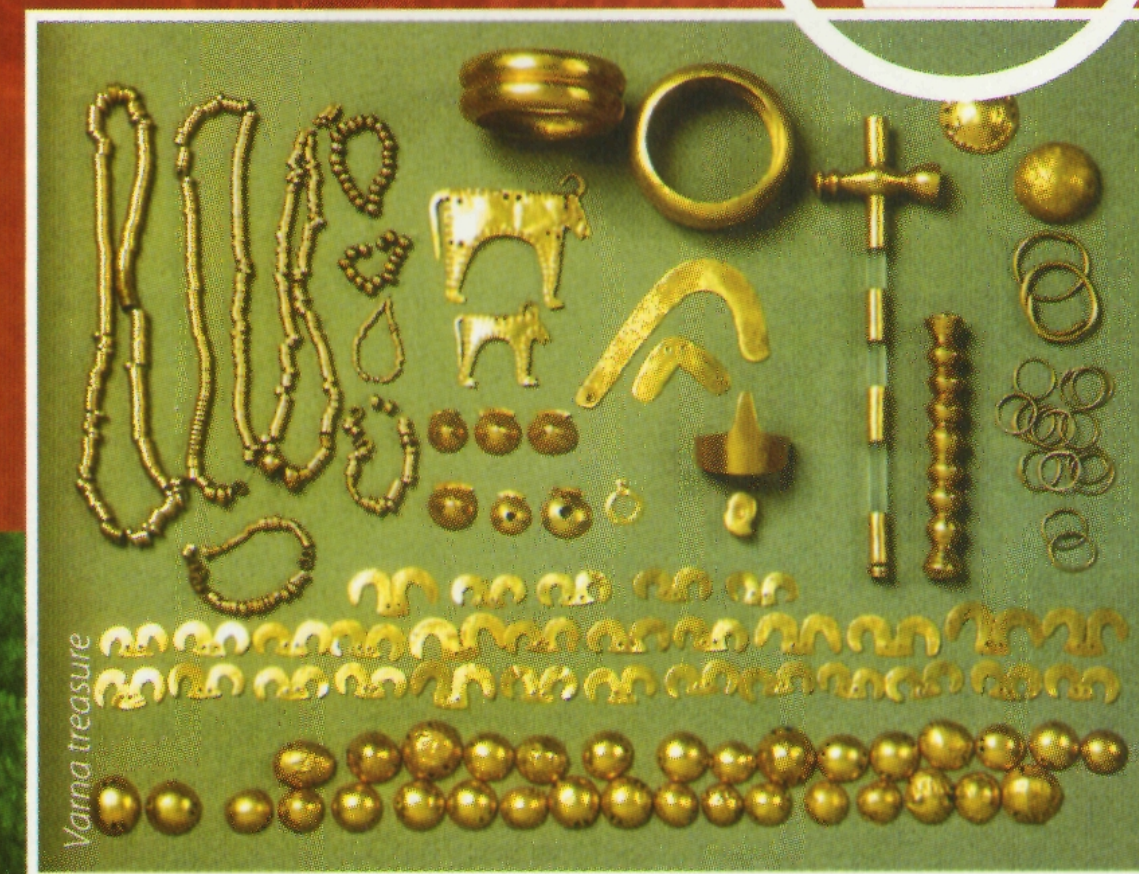


CULTURE ON THE BLACK SEA

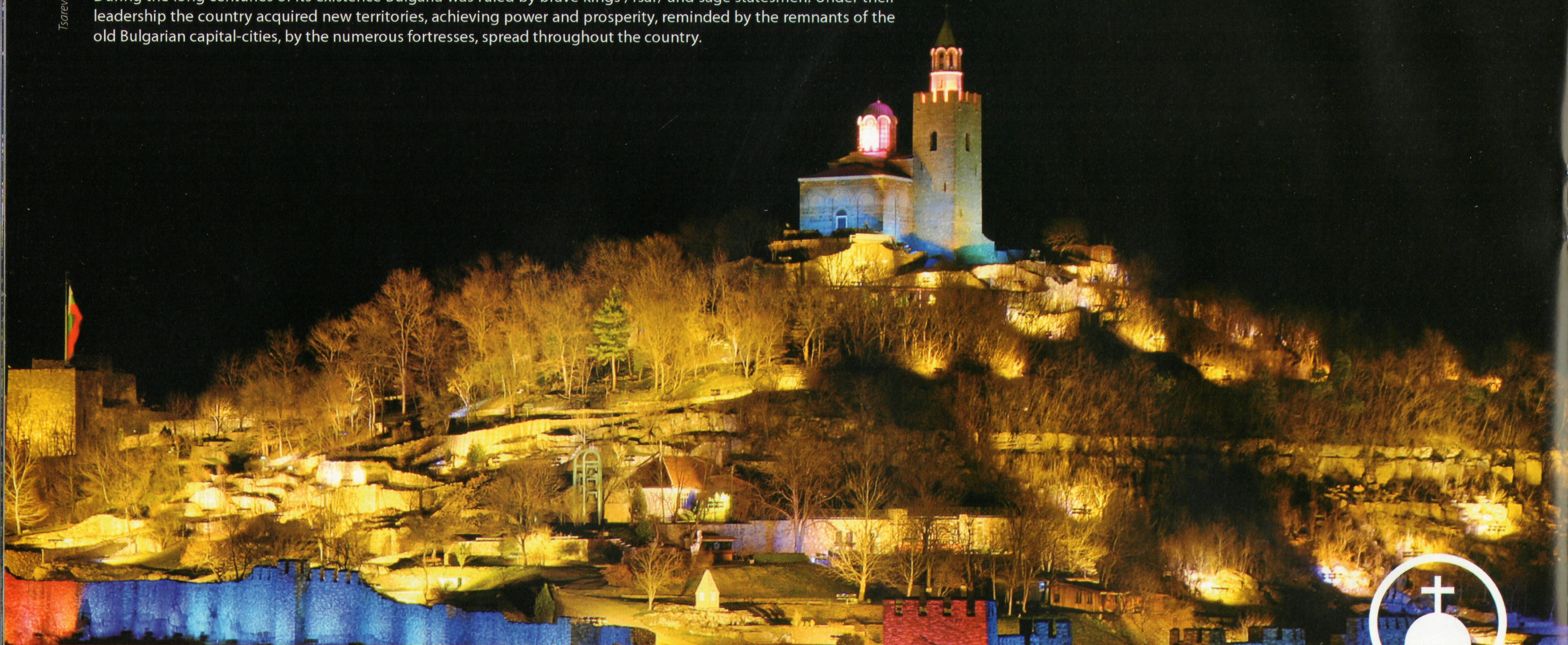




The Palace, the Botanic Garden of the Rumanian Queen Maria – these are the things coming to the mind of the tourist after mentioning the name of **BALCHIK** – the White Town, built on white limestone cliffs.



During the long centuries of its existence Bulgaria was ruled by brave kings /Tsar/ and sage statesmen. Under their leadership the country acquired new territories, achieving power and prosperity, reminded by the remnants of the old Bulgarian capital-cities, by the numerous fortresses, spread throughout the country.



THE ANCIENT BULGARIAN CAPITAL-CITIES



The seal of Tsar Simeon, Preslav

PLISKA – the first Bulgarian capital from year 681, was one of the most widely known cities in the early European Middle Ages. Its stone-built palaces, its fortresses and churches were rivalling the edifices of Constantinople, or those in the lands of Charles the Great.

After their discovery the antics have undergone conservation and are now on display as an open-air museum – the National History-Archaeology Reserve Pliska, at a distance of 28 km from the town of Shumen.

VELIKO TARNOVO – the Middle-Ages capital of Bulgaria is remarkably rich in cultural and historic landmark signs. Spreading on three hills, it has a history of 7 000 years. On the hill named Tsarevets is the main fortress of Medieval Tarnovgrad, topped by the two palaces – the Royal Palace and that of the Patriarch. Later in the evening it is all “sound and light”, a special program to present the place, which became the most impressive attraction for the visitors of the town. This program is a combination of sound and visual effects, aimed at reproducing the history of the old Bulgarian capital. The medieval churches – that of *St Dimitar Solunski*, where Tarnovo was proclaimed as capital, the Church of the 40 martyrs with its marble colonnade – are also very attractive for the visitors.

Just 4 km to the North-East of Veliko Tarnovo is **THE ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORY RESERVE ARBANASI**, a village whose monumental houses and churches are generously ornamented with wood-carvings and wall paintings. One of the most lovable places to visit there is the Church of the Nativity, its iconostasis being one of the oldest creations of the wood-carving art on Bulgarian lands.

Some 20 km from Veliko Tarnovo you'll find the ruins of Nikopolis ad Istrum, the majestic roman town, founded by Emperor Trajan.



VELIKI (THE GREAT) PRESLEV is the second Bulgarian capital. The remainders of these glorious times can be seen in the Archaeological Reserve Veliki Preslav and the Museum, which is part of the Reserve. Some very celebrated troves were found there – the ceramic icon of St Theodor Stratilat, the Golden Treasure of Preslav, the ceramic iconostasis of the Monastery-in-the-Palace, the unique collection of state-seals made of lead, the valuable collection of epigraphic monuments.

Next to the village of Madara, some 20 km from the town of Shumen, not far from the ancient Bulgarian capitals is the Horse-Rider of Madara. This is Europe's only such relief carved in the rocks in the Early Middle Ages, it is included in the UNESCO list. Carved in the 8-9-th century on a vertical rock at a height of 23 meters, this relief portrays a life-size rider, a lion pierced by his spear, lying under the feet of his horse, with a dog running behind the horse. This is a real masterpiece of the medieval Bulgarian art. The Madara Rider is symbolizing the might of the Bulgarian state in the time of the Khans.



The most exciting periods of Bulgaria's past, the most beautiful architectural monuments, the most memorable places are those, linked to the Bulgarian Revival. A walk or a drive there would give us a chance to take an imaginary transformation back in the time and to touch an atmosphere with plenty of beauty, calm, cosiness.

Koprivshtitsa



MUSEUM-TOWNS

KOPRIVSHITSA is an architectural and history reserve, keeping more than 300 monuments of Bulgarian culture, the gentle story-teller of the beautiful tale of the Bulgarian Revival. The houses there are built on steep slopes, shaping terraces, the roof-shelters covering the large balconies, all this surrounded by high stone-fences with high and large wooden doors. Looked at from outside, the houses are lavishly decorated, with many windows and bow-windows, the majority painted in blue, yellow or red.

TRYAVNA is also a Revival town on the Northern mountainside of the Mountain Stara Planina. The old houses in Tryavna are built following an architectural pattern of their own. The most distinguished places, believed to symbolize the town are the Town-Clock Tower, the Hunchback Bridge, the Church of Archangel Michael, the "Daskal (Teacher's) House. The Old City is given the status of Architectural Reserve.

Not far from Tryavna – another concentration of a town and a near by village literally keeping alive the memories of the Revival art – the town is **TROYAN**, the village – Oreshak. The Museum of People's Artisan and Applied Arts – unique in his character in the whole country – is located in the very centre of Troyan.

MELNIK is Bulgaria's smallest town, but its attractiveness is so strong, that there are days, when the tourists and visitors outnumber the local citizens. Melnik is famous with its old-style houses, rich in architecture, with history full of legendary events, with its incredibly beautiful nature, fancy rocky formations, and, last but not least – full-bodied, aromatic wines. One of the customers named Winston Churchill, used to order the delivery of 500 litres of the wonderful Melnishko wine. Melnik is declared a Culture and History Reserve, and is, also, a Museum Town.



The Ancient Plovdiv is also a place for an unforgettable journey through the romantics of the Revival. The labyrinth of cobblestone streets is seeded with colourful houses, painted in brick colours, in yellow, in beige. There are houses with unique interior decorations, wall-paintings, cosy inner courtyards. These houses are usually known by the names of their owners – Balabanova, Hindilian, or of famous visitors as are the case with the Lamartine-house, or function - the Ethnography Museum - and carry with them the fame of enchanting beauty. During your town-tour don't miss visiting the Antic Theatre, the Antic Roman Stadium, the Dzhumaya Mosque, Nebet Tepe.



In Bulgaria it is still possible to enjoy the delight of visiting several pretty villages with their virgin natural environment – as if untouched by time.



VILLAGES – ARCHITECTURAL RESERVES



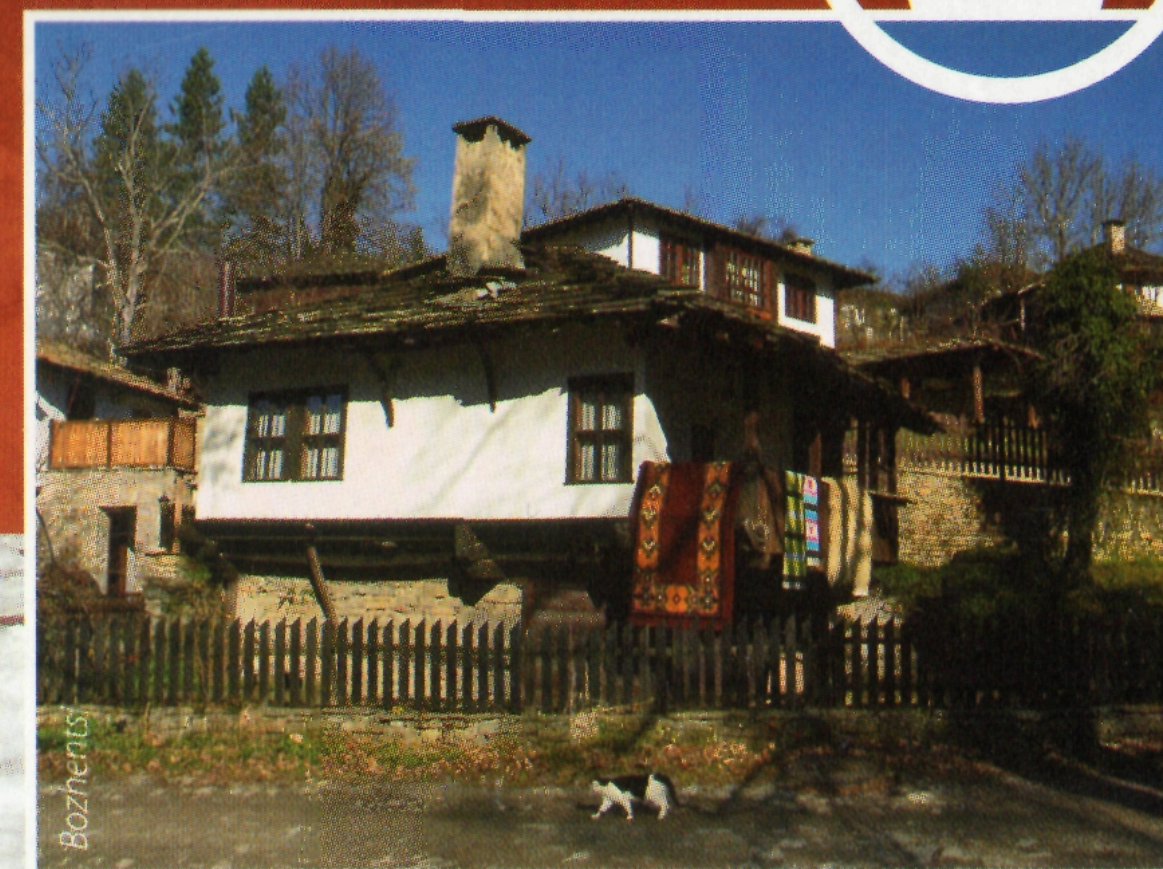
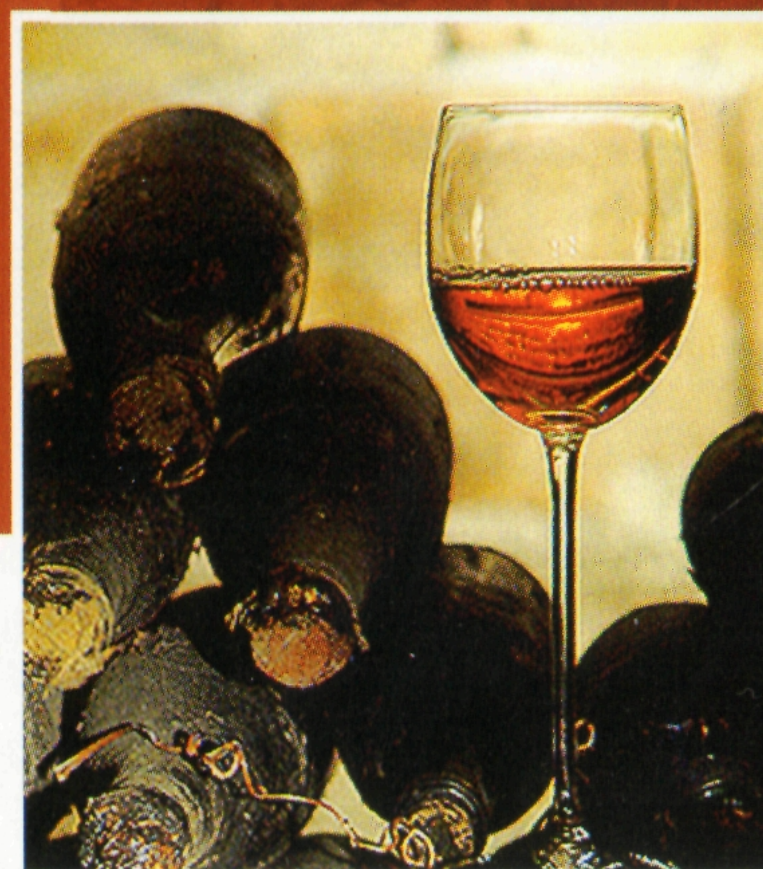
BOZHENTSI is a village tucked away in the picturesque scenery to the east of the town of Gabrovo. It is one of the very few places in Bulgaria, having kept intact its old-time appearance of the Revival period, preserving precious architectural and ethnographic monuments.

ETARA is the name of a charming open-air ethnography museum, located in the central part of the mountain Stara Planina, in the Gabrovo Region. The Exposition is live – with the participation of the Master-Craftsmen – presenting the architecture, ethnography, the folklore, the old crafts, the cuisine, the dressing habits of Revival Bulgaria.

KOVACHEVITSA is a village in which its authentic Revival appearance was so well preserved, that it is now one of the well-known and beautiful Bulgarian villages. The houses are almost entirely stone-built, this is valid even for the roofs. An exception is possible only in case the house is very high, then the last floor is built with wood. In the years of Revival Kovachevitsa was a focus of educational and clerical activities.

THE VILLAGE OF ZHERAVNA is an Architecture and Ethnography Reserve with slightly more than 150 houses, reminding the past with its candle workshop, cellar-school, nunnery, church, 8 tap-fountains, caravansary, all with their Revival authenticity. Any one of these points of interest is an inimitable cultural monument, work of The Unknown Artists. The positioning of the village is amphitheatric.

Bansko, Leshten, Dolen, Shiroka Laka, Kotel, Brashlian, Medven, Elena, the Old Varosha in Lovech and many more small towns and villages keep and cherish this romantic and all-embracing spirit of the Revival. This spirit is still there – in the beautifully decorated houses, on the cobblestone streets, in the charming shops selling artisan goods - but, most importantly, in the memory of the people. Memory, preserved through generations, and transmitted to further generations.



Our journey in the world of reality and mystic is coming to its end. You got acquainted with part of Bulgaria's history and culture, but, you will not be able to understand the spirit of Bulgaria without plunging in the fascinating world of our customs, traditions and festivities.

THE HOLYDAY OF THE ROSE is one of the most remarkable festivals in Bulgaria, dedicated to Beauty as such, and to its components – the flowers, the spring and the fragrance of the rose of Kazanlak. Traditionally, the Holyday of the Rose is taking place in the first weekend of June, and it includes a beauty contest for the *Queen of Roses*.



CUSTOMS AND FESTIVALS IN BULGARIA



Mummers – **KUKERY** in Bulgarian – is another one of the country's symbols. About New Year and Shrovetide special ritual ceremonies are taking place, called Kukery Games. In Kukery Games only men are allowed to take part, they put on their masks, made in advance by every one of the participants. The goal is through their magic-dancing and horrifying masks to frighten and drive away the evil spirits and weird sisters in order to ensure and preserve a good crop next year. Traditionally, such kukery festivals take place in many cities, with those of Pernik, Shiroka Laka and Dobrich considered to be the best.

It is also a long lasting tradition in our lands to celebrate **GRAND MOTHER MARTA**, Baba Marta in Bulgarian. It is one of our oldest traditions – to attach on the dress of those you love a martenichka symbolizing the arrival of springtime. Martenichka is an ancient Bulgarian garment, bringing magic strength, made by the simple twisting of two threads – red and white. It is widely believed, that martenichka is protecting people against black magic and evil forces. The white thread symbolizing longevity, the red one – good health and prosperity. Martenichka is attached to one's dress on March 1, and should be carried on until the arrival of the first couple of storks, or the first time you hear the singing of a cuckoo. Then the martenichka is to be tied to a fruit-bearing tree, or, another option – to be thrown in a river, to wash away all evil.

Traditionally, every year in December in the region of Plovdiv comes the time of the **DIONYSIUS FESTIVITIES** – otherwise known as the Holydays of the Young Wine. Guests as well as people from the region taste the wines of the new crop. Another tradition, by the end of summer, are the festivities known as The Valley of the Thracian Kings. In the program of these festivities – a number of cultural events and attractions, such as night-shows on the mounds, depicting the life-style of the Thracians, exhibitions, theatrical or dancing performances, wine-parties dedicated to the Thracian wines, of course.



NESTINAR – or fire dancing – is one of the most ancient traditions, preserved and performed in the area of Mountain Strandzha. The magic rite of dancing on the red-hot ashes, expressing veneration to the Sun, is calling together thousands of enthusiastic fans. A big-size ceremonial fire is lit in the village's centre after the light of the day comes to close. The youth of the village is round – dancing the horo – with the fire at the centre of their circles. When the wood in the fire burns out, forming a layer of ashes, there comes the moment of the fire-dancers. They enter bare-footed into the red-hot ashes with the icon of St Constantine and Elena in hand, and dance in a trance, feeling no pain, with feet unharmed.





TRADITIONAL BULGARIAN CRAFTSMANSHIP

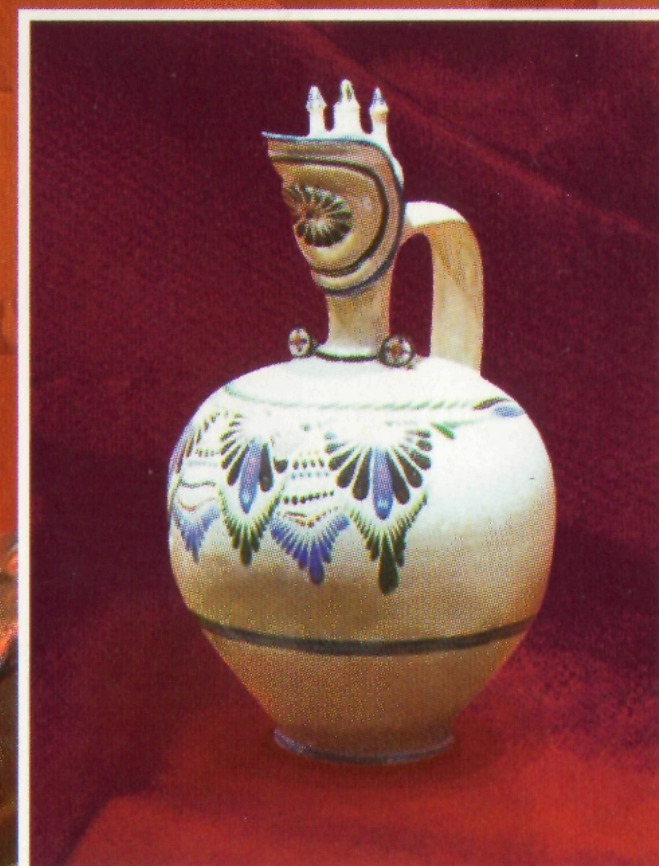


The exquisiteness, the elegance of the works of Bulgarian people's craftsmanship is undoubtedly a matter of fact.

From time immemorial the Bulgarians have been carving the wood, reproducing the nature on their shepherd's pipes and crooks, chests and cradles – everywhere it was possible. Wood made much of the household belongings, the skilful hands of the craftsmen were enlivening it and thus it turned into a part of the interior arrangement of the house. In some old houses in Tryavna, Kotel, Koprivshtitsa one could enjoy seeing genuine perfect compositions of **BULGARIAN WOODCARVING**. But Bulgarian craftsmen were famous with their small-size pieces of work as well – such as spoons, spoon-boxes, bread-boxes, bowls, spindles, tripods, chandeliers, nut-crackers etc. This marvellous collection increases with the addition of music instruments – shepherd's pipes, rebecks, bag-pipes.

In many cases – mainly in iconostasis - woodcarving comes together with drawing and painting. **BULGARIA'S ICON-PAINTING** pattern is a precious gift given by the Masters of icon painting, who started creating this tradition back in the 10-11th centuries. The best works of our Masters can be seen in the Museum of Ecclesiastical History, belonging to the Clerical Seminary in Sofia, but also in the wonderful scenery of the Monastery "Preobrazhenski" (or "Transfiguration"), the Holy Cloister of Rila, in the churches of Arbanasi, Sliven, Tryavna.

Speaking about **BULGARIAN CRAFTSMANSHIP** could turn into a long story – items made of brass and copper, leather-works, goldsmith jewellery are being preserved till our days. But the craftsmanship where tradition is preserved to the utmost detail is the wine-making. Thracians were among the best-known and looked-after wine-makers. In The Iliad Homer describes a scene – ships from Thrace loaded with wine coming to lie alongside the Greek camp in front of the gates of Troy. Scientists from the National History Museum have found traces of wine on the golden utensils of the famous Golden Treasure of Panagyurishte, after 20 centuries in a tomb.



POTTERY-MAKING is a typical Bulgarian craft, in practice since the time Thracians and Romans lived on our lands. The craftsmen produced pots, jars, earthen-jugs, pitchers, bowls, hotchpotch dishes, censers and other objects. One thing that impresses the visitor is the richness in the colouring of the stencils on the ceramic. In the town of Troyan in the Museum of Craftsmanship, you will enjoy the artistry and imagination of the craftsmen of applied arts.



Kaba-gaida players



There is one more area - where one is to feel the unfading beauty of people's arts and crafts – **BULGARIAN EMBROIDERY**, with its intricate geometrical forms, used mainly as decoration to the traditional national dress. The art of making textile includes the weaving of table-cloth, rugs and carpets made of hand-dyed yarn with natural dye.

The carpet-making Chiprovtsi-style is doubtlessly a phenomenon of astounding effect on the visitor. No lesser is the fame of the carpets made in Kotel, or the rugs of the Rodopi Mountains.

In the Rodopi area of present days, kaba-gaida, or bag-pipe of some typical local characteristics, is the most widely-spread instrument. This bag-pipe keeps the form and the sound of the times of the mythical Orpheus, reaching the hearts of the people with same mystical strength.

The culture of contemporary Bulgaria has also its high achievements. In the art galleries you could discover works of present-time Bulgarian authors, together with the works of the Classics of Bulgarian and foreign art. All year-round festivals of different kinds of art are taking place, the best-known among them – Music Summer of Varna, the Weeks of Music in Sofia, the Days of Art Apolonia and also theatre and jazz festivals.

CONTEMPORARY BULGARIAN ART

The magic of the Choir, bearing the name The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices is still having its power to fascinate their thousands of fans. The folklore-song and dance companies from Bulgaria are regularly invited to take part in the most prestigious international festivals. **THE NATIONAL OPERA AND BALLET THEATRE, THE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY OF SOFIA** can bring to you the pleasure of the wonderful interpretations of our opera-singers and musicians, performing the works of Bulgarian and foreign authors. **THE NATIONAL THEATRE IVAN VAZOV**, as well as the other public or private theatres will offer you a long list to select from stage-settings of different genres.





USEFUL INFORMATION

State system: Parliamentary Republic

Area: 110,994 sq km

Population: 7,973, 671

Capital city: Sofia (1.2 MLN)

Official language: Bulgarian

Alphabet: Cyrillic

Religion: Eastern Orthodox Christianity – 85%, Muslim – 8%, Others –7%

Time zone: GMT(London)+2 hrs, East European Time Zone (Germany)+1 hr

Climate: Average temperatures in January between –2 and +2° C in the plains, till –10° C in the mountain areas.

July between 20-30° C in the plains and 10-15° C in the higher mountain areas.

Monetary unit: the Bulgarian Lev (1 EUR = 1.955 BGN). Money can be changed in the banks or in any Change Offices. Euro-cheques can be validated in the banks.

Important telephone numbers:

Emergency call number: 112

National call number of the customer: 0700 11122

CONTACT DETAILS

MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, ENERGY AND TOURISM

8, Slavyanska Street

1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

Tel.: +359 2/ 933 58 11

Fax: +359 2/ 988 23 15

e-mail: info@bulgariatravel.org

www.bulgariatravel.org





WWW.BULGARIATRAVEL.ORG